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## **The Chinese Boycott: A Social Movement in Singapore and Malaya in the Early Twentieth Century\***

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the causes, developments, characteristics, and significance of the 1905 anti-American boycott movement in Singapore and Malaya. The author argues that the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya in the first decade of the twentieth century should not be simplistically classified into two camps, the supporters of the Reformists and those of the Revolutionaries, as conventional wisdom has suggested. In 1905, Chinese with different political ideologies all worked together to boycott American goods for their self interests. They were concerned about their rights of residency and work in the British colonies. They feared that should the anti-Chinese policy prevailed in the United States, the British government would adopt a similar measure against the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya. The author also argues that the boycott movement was one of the earliest popular movements in the region because the Chinese from different social strata were all mobilized. More significantly, the 1905 boycott laid the foundation for popular support of the revolutionary movement in the subsequent years.

In June 1905 two unusual public meetings were held in Singapore and Penang, respectively. On June 20, about 200 Chinese rallied at the Thong Chai Hospital on Wayang Street, located in downtown Singapore, and passed a resolution to boycott American goods [U.S. National Archives 1833-1906: June 23, 1905]. Six days later, Chinese merchants in Penang gathered in Pingzhang Huiguan, the Chinese Town Hall, in support of the boycott [*ibid.*: July 4, 1905]. The two historical events unveiled a series of anti-American activities in Singapore and Malaya. This paper aims to examine the development of the boycott campaigns in the region, analyze the characteristics of the social movement, and investigate the significance of the anti-foreign protest. To understand the causes of the 1905 Chinese boycott in Singapore and Malaya, one

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must trace its origins to American attitude towards Chinese immigration in the late nineteenth century and the outbreak of the anti-American boycott in China, which was launched a month prior to that in Singapore and Malaya.

## I Historical Background

The seeds of the anti-American boycott campaign were planted in the middle of the nineteenth century, when tens of thousands of Chinese crossed the Pacific to the United States to seek their fortune. In China, the Opium War (1839-1842), the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), and natural disasters as droughts, floods, and insect plagues had brought famine, social disorder and suffering, thus contributing to the "push" factors for the migration. The "pull" factors were the discovery of gold in California in 1849, and the demand for laborers to construct the transcontinental railroad in the 1860s.<sup>1)</sup> These early migrants had no intention of staying on permanently in the United States. Their main objective was to work hard and amass a large fortune to bring home with them to China. Unfortunately, most of them failed to do this and were compelled by circumstances to stay on in the United States to eke out a living.

With completion of the Central Pacific Railroad in 1869, former railroad workers, both Chinese and whites, had to look for alternative jobs. The white laborers viewed their Chinese competitors as a threat, and agitation against the Chinese became widespread. This was further aggravated by the fact that in the 1870s the United States was caught in the grip of a worldwide economic depression and unemployment was rife. Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that white Americans, confronted with a group of foreigners whom they did not understand and consumed by their own tribulations, should turn on the foreigners, blaming them for the cause of their troubles. Such sentiments were also common among the politicians of the time. Chinese immigration became a popular issue in electoral campaigns in the United States in the 1870s.

The causes of the anti-Chinese movements were not merely economic and political but also social and racial. The Chinese immigrants brought with them their social customs, and a culture alien to the Americans. They did not try to assimilate themselves into the American community. Living in so-called "Chinese quarters," they kept much to themselves except during work hours. The Americans were critical of certain practices of the Chinese, namely, opium-smoking, prostitution-soliciting and gambling, and believed they were social menaces to American society. Racism was another cause of the anti-Chinese movement and could be found in the propaganda campaign of the exclusionists and the speeches of congressmen.<sup>2)</sup> In a pamphlet "Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion," published by the president of the American Federation of Labor, Samuel Gompers, he asserted that "racial differences between American

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1) For the "push-pull" theory of migration, see Bogue [1959: 468-509] and Thomas [1959: 510-543].

2) For the collection of political and editorial cartoons first appeared in American periodicals, including *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Judge*, *Puck*, and *Wasp*, see Choy *et al.* [1994].

whites and Asiatics would never be overcome. The superior whites had to exclude the inferior Asiatics, by law, or if necessary by force of arms" [Chen, Jack 1980: 132].

The arguments against Chinese immigration could also be explained in psychological terms. To accept work on an equal basis with a Chinese laborer would lower one's self-respect. Thus the conflict with the Chinese immigrants sometimes rested not on economic competition but on the white man's fear of losing self-respect if he work side by side as an equal with a man of an inferior race [Riggs 1950: 18-19]. Another psychological effect came from the huge population of China. China could send ten per cent of its 400 million people abroad and scarcely felt the loss. But if 40 million Chinese crossed the Pacific, they would add a sizable proportion to the U.S. population. Americans responded to this psychological argument by attacking Chinese immigrants and eventually by enacting a law to exclude them. They realized that legislation was the only effective way to check Chinese immigration. The result was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 with 15 provisions.

The 1882 Act prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers, skilled and unskilled, for ten years; and required all Chinese immigrants to be registered and to carry passports at all times. The last item of the provisions denied Chinese the opportunity to become citizens of the United States [U.S. Department of State 1881-1883: 58-61]. The 1882 Exclusion Act was the first immigration act passed by the Congress of the United States. However, it did not spell the end of the Chinese immigration issue; instead it paved the way for further restriction. In the next two decades more treaties were signed or revised and more bills were passed, including the Scott Act of 1888, the Geary Law of 1892, and the Gresham-Yang Treaty of 1894. The 1894 Treaty provided for the absolute exclusion of Chinese laborers for ten years and placed further limits on Chinese returning to the United States [Coolidge 1909: 236-238]. The last article of the Gresham-Yang Treaty stated that the treaty would automatically be effected for another ten-year term, unless one of the signatories declared willingness to discontinue it six months before its expiration on December 7, 1904 [U.S. Department of State 1971: 691-694; 1906: Rockhill to Hay, May 6, 1905, memorandum]. When the expiration date came close, China, under public pressure, informed the United States of its unwillingness to renew the treaty. The U.S. then pressed China to accept a new treaty with similar terms. It was the negotiation for this new treaty that sparked the anti-American boycott in China.

While the exclusionary laws and labor treaties set the stage for the boycott, tales of the mistreatment of Chinese in the United States provided touching stories that moved the Chinese audience and agitated them to action. With the bilateral treaties and Chinese exclusion laws, the United States had succeeded in excluding Chinese laborers, and the number of incoming Chinese immigrants decreased rapidly. But anti-Chinese promoters were not satisfied. Anti-Chinese riots increased, and violent outbreaks spread across North America. The most tragic incident occurred in September 1885 at Rock Spring, Wyoming Territory, where a mob killed 28 Chinese miners and wounded many others [Tsai 1983: 72-73]. Another massacre occurred in June 1887, when a group of white men murdered ten Chinese miners at the Log Cabin Bar near Snake River, Oregon.

The complaint of mistreatment by the Americans became an issue of concern for the Chinese at home in the early years of the twentieth century. For example, in early August 1905, in an explanatory note to the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce (comprising 126 foreign company members, including 66 British, 25 German, 10 American, 7 French, and 4 Japanese companies), the cotton merchants of Shanghai indicated that "owing to the cruel treatment afforded to our laboring classes by the Americans," the Chinese had decided on a prohibitory program and "at a meeting unanimously decided that the only way to protest against the American action is to stop using goods of American manufacture and to cease selling them" [China, Shanghai Municipal Archives, W1-0-366].

The culmination of anger over mistreatment, the existence of extreme displeasure with the exclusion laws, and the rise of political awareness and nationalistic sentiment made China unusually intransigent in dealing with the United States over the renewal of the Gresham-Yang Treaty. But the discontinuation of the 1894 Treaty in 1904 did not mean that Chinese were free from exclusion. Exclusion laws enacted in previous years remained in effect. To protect Chinese interests, the Qing government sought a newer, and more moderate treaty. The Chinese government authorized its diplomatic representative in Washington, Liang Cheng, to negotiate with the State Department for a new treaty.<sup>3)</sup> But the U.S. government decided not to negotiate with Liang Cheng, who was a tough negotiator, and sent William Rockhill to China to negotiate directly with the Chinese Foreign Ministry. For fear that Beijing officials would sell out under American pressure, Shanghai merchants called for a boycott against American goods to put pressure on both sides of the negotiation team.

On May 10, 1905, members of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce, established in 1904 by Chinese merchants, met and passed a resolution that a boycott would be called in two months if the American government failed to improve its immigration policy towards the Chinese [Xu and Qian 1991: 67-87]. The American government did not take the boycott threat seriously. The Chinese then initiated the boycott ahead of schedule, before the two-month grace period expired. The development of communication technology such as cables and telegraph enabled the boycott to be publicized nationwide and across the world. Within weeks, boycott activities were initiated in major cities in China, including Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Suzhou, Tianjin, Beijing, Wuhan as well as the inner towns in the provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, and Henan. When the boycott message spread to Chinese communities abroad, especially those in Southeast Asia, it received overwhelming support from the overseas Chinese. Hitherto, studies done on the boycott movement focused mainly on the events in China [Remer 1933; Field 1957; Rhoads 1962; Zhang 1966; Kikuchi 1974; Wang, Guanhua 1994; Wong 1995a], and neglected the fact that Chinese residents in Singapore and Malaya also participated actively in the movement. The following section would fill this gap by highlighting the activities in Southeast Asia.

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3 ) For detailed description of the negotiations, see McKee [1977: 116-125].

## II The Boycott Campaigns in Singapore and Malaya

The Chinese in Singapore and Malaya had joined the anti-American boycott primarily because they feared that if the immigration policy of the United States continued, the British authorities might impose similar exclusionary policy in their colonies in the near future. Years before the Chinese crossed the Pacific to the west coast of North America for gold rush in 1849, their countrymen had emigrated to Nanyang (Southeast Asia) in considerable numbers. The foundation of the British settlements in Penang in 1786 and in Singapore in 1819 attracted large numbers of Chinese to trade and to work there [Yen 1986: 3]. After the contract-coolie system was introduced in 1845, groups of Chinese laborers went to Nanyang on a regular basis [Pan 1990: 45]. The establishment of British political control over the Malay states after 1874 and the economic development in British Malaya accelerated the influx of Chinese immigrants. By 1900, the number of Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia far outnumbered those in other parts of the world. In Singapore, the Chinese constituted 70 per cent of the population, making for a predominantly Chinese society.

In traditional Chinese society, elaborate family and clan systems were well established. The systems were transplanted into the Chinese communities in Singapore and Malaya [Yen 1976: 6]. When a person is in trouble, needs financial help, or needs assistance in the performance of a ceremonial obligation, he requires a measure of aid beyond what his own immediate family can provide. In such circumstances he can turn to the members of his larger kin group for help [*ibid.*: 6-7].

Besides the kinship ties, there also existed another strong social tie which was based on dialect [*ibid.*: 7]. There were five main linguistic groups in the Chinese communities in Singapore and Malaya before 1900. They were the Hokkien, the Cantonese, the Hakka, the Teochew, and the Hainanese. Moreover, an occupational pattern formed along the lines of dialect origin: the Hokkien were mainly petty traders, importers and exporters, porters, boatmen, and sago manufacturers; the Teochew were chiefly gambier and pepper planters, cloth and rice retailers, and fishermen; the Cantonese were mainly cabinet-makers, carpenters, woodcutters, and tailors; most of the Hakka were blacksmiths, shoemakers, and pawnbrokers; and almost all of the Hainanese were coffee shop operators and domestic servants [*ibid.*: 7-8; Mak 1995: 60-67]. The different dialect groups also formed their own associations based on their place of origin in China.<sup>4)</sup> These various differences and occupational monopoly contributed to the creation of social classes and conflict in the Chinese communities.

British colonialists did not directly interfere with Chinese affairs as long as the Chinese did not threaten the security and political stability, and British economic interests. But the fear and anxiety of being excluded became stronger among Nanyang Chinese in all dialect groups as

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4) The main functions of the dialect and clan associations were to provide social welfare services and protection to their members. For a detail discussion of these associations, see Yen [1986: 35-109].

they continued to hear news about the exclusion and maltreatment of their fellowmen in the United States. Soon after the boycott started in Shanghai, Chinese merchants in Singapore and Penang received telegrams from their counterparts in China urging them to join the boycott [Godley 1981: 123; *Straits Times*, June 9, 1905]. They held meetings to discuss the proposed boycott of American goods and decided to join in action with Shanghai merchants to protect their self interests [*China Mail*, June 21, 1905].

Most of the Chinese in Singapore were not surprised by the anti-American gathering on June 20, 1905. Since the boycott movement was called by the merchants in Shanghai a month earlier, a Chinese press in Singapore, the *Lat Pau*, was reporting the anti-American activities in China regularly.<sup>5)</sup> For example, in the article entitled "Patriotic Chinese Merchants," the author described in full detail the first anti-American meeting held in Shanghai, as well as subsequent meetings held by the leaders of the Cantonese *bang*<sup>6)</sup> and the Hokkien *bang*, respectively, in the city. The proposed measures to be taken against American interest were also enumerated. To encourage Singapore Chinese to attend the local meeting, the *Lat Pau* posted the following announcement on its front page on June 17:

Because of American exclusion against Chinese immigration, commercial guilds in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Canton, and other cities in China held meetings, one after another, to initiate boycott measures (against American goods). This is a matter of national dignity and all the Chinese merchants here should support it. Therefore, the Chinese merchants in Singapore decided to hold a meeting to discuss necessary measures to be taken at the Thong Chai Hospital at 2 pm on the 18th day of this month (June 20, 1905 in solar calendar), in order to preserve our sovereignty and to prevent undesirable consequences (from happening in the future). [*Lat Pau*, June 17, 1905]

This announcement proposed three main reasons why the Chinese in Singapore should support the boycott. First, it was a matter of national dignity. Although the Chinese in Singapore had to make their living abroad, they were concerned about their families and homeland. In addition, most Chinese immigrants who were victims of the American exclusion acts came from the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, which were also the home provinces of most Chinese in Singapore. The love of the brotherhood and their personal experience of living in a foreign land spurred them to support their fellowmen to fight American discriminatory regulations. Secondly, it was a matter of upholding Chinese sovereignty. China had many military confrontations with the western powers since the Opium War of 1839-42, and China was defeated each time, followed by the signing of treaties which granted foreigners many

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5) At least seven pieces of commentaries and news reports appeared in the *Lat Pau* prior to the first boycott meeting in Singapore, including those published on May 19, May 27, June 13, June 15, June 17, and June 19, 1905.

6) *Bang* is a politico-socio-economic grouping along the lines of dialect, locality, and occupation. For a discussion of the concept of *bang*, see Yong [1977: 32-34].

privileges, including extraterritoriality, indemnity and lands. The self-esteem of the Chinese was hurt. The Chinese felt that when their government was too weak to uphold the sovereignty, they had to do something themselves. Thus, when the merchants called for a united action against American mistreatment of Chinese immigrants, it provided them with the very opportunity they were hoping for. Thirdly, the Chinese in Singapore participated in the boycott movement because they were afraid that if they had not acted, their ruler — the British Empire — would adopt similar measures to exclude Chinese immigrants in the near future. Should this materialize, the Chinese in Singapore would be the victims. Therefore, to support the anti-American boycott was to send a clear signal to the British colonialists and to prevent the British from adopting similar exclusion measures against them.

During the meeting of June 20, Lim Boon Keng (Lin Wenqing 林文庆), one of the organizers of the rally, called for the formalization of a proper course of action against American interest [Yen 1976: 64]. Lim, who was born in 1869 in Singapore, received his formal education in English, and was the first Chinese in the Straits Settlements to win a Queen's Scholarship to study medicine at Edinburgh University, where he took his degree in 1892 [Lee, Guan Kin 1990: 23]. Lim returned to Singapore in 1893 and soon became one of the leaders in Chinese community. Two other leaders who attended the public meeting, Tan Chor Nam (Chen Chunan 陈楚楠) and Tan Hoon Chew, proposed a resolution similar to that approved by Shanghai merchants. The resolution, which urged that the Chinese traders in Singapore stop all trade in American goods, was passed unanimously [*Hong Kong Daily Press*, June 29, 1905]. They set up an ad hoc committee, consisting of a chairman and four members. Lim was elected chairman, and four prominent merchants — Wu Rongjia (吴荣甲), Jian Renshi (简仁石), Zeng Zhaonan (曾兆南), and Zhang Langxi (张浪溪) — served as committee members [*Lat Pau*, June 21, 1905; Yen 1976: 87n, 190]. The four committee members represented the four largest dialect groups in Singapore — Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, and Hakka — respectively. Thus, it became one of the earliest social movements in Singapore in which people from different dialect groups were involved.

In the middle of the meeting, You Lie (尤列) announced that the Chinese Christians would support their countrymen and called on American missionaries to return to their home countries [*Lat Pau*, June 21, 1905; *Hong Kong Daily Press*, June 29, 1905; Yen 1976: 87n]. He was the most emotional speaker in the meeting and his speech stirred up anti-American sentiments of the audience. You Lie was a native of Shunde county in Guangdong province and had a long revolutionary career. When he was a student in Hong Kong, You Lie had been known as one of the *Sidakou* (The four great rebels), the most outspoken opponents of Manchu rule [Feng 1965: I, 40]. The other three "great rebels" were Sun Yat-sen (孙中山), Yang Heling (杨鹤龄), and Chen Shaobai (陈少白), all of whom later became prominent revolutionary leaders. You Lie came to Singapore in early 1901. His arrival marked a turning point of early revolutionary contact with the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, for it was he who laid the foundation for revolutionary activities in this region [Yen 1976: 41]. You Lie preached revolution under the guise of promoting Chinese education and Confucianism. He set up a classroom in 1904 and



gave lectures regularly about the Four Classics, the core of Confucianism [*loc. cit.*]. In the meantime, You Lie, who was also a medical doctor and had trained in the Hong Kong Medical School, opened a clinic named I Ye Lou (One-leaf house) in Chinatown where he could keep in touch with people of all classes [*ibid.*: 44]. He also provided free medical treatments for the poor in exchange for their support for his political ideology.

During the mass rally, participants agreed upon drafting and sending telegrams to the Chinese government and to the American Minister in Beijing, explaining the reasons for their gathering and the measures they had decided to take against the Americans. After the meeting, many Chinese in Singapore began to join the boycott campaign by either not buying American goods or not making any business deal with the Americans. For example, most Chinese refused to use tramcars and, therefore, the business of the Singapore Tramway Company was adversely affected [Song 1984: 375]. In actual fact, the tramway service was funded by the British but was wrongly identified as an American enterprise.

Penang was another city with large population of Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia. As in Singapore, most of the Chinese in Penang came from the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian. They usually arrived in Penang via Singapore, which served as the hub of the traffic in Southeast Asia. News concerning their homeland also spread from Singapore to other Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, either by telegram or through the mouths of the new immigrants. So, when news about anti-American activities in Shanghai and Singapore spread to Penang, Chinese merchants in the city held a meeting on June 27 in the Chinese Town Hall to show their support for the boycott [*Lat Pau*, June 24, 1905]. The direct instigation of the gathering was indeed a letter sent by Lim Boon Keng to the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce soon after conclusion of the rally in Singapore. In the letter Lim called for the merchants in Penang to support the boycott campaign. Lim Kek Chuan (Lin Kequan 林克全), president of the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce, who presided over the meeting, proclaimed that the purpose of the gathering was to conduct a similar action in accordance to their countrymen in Shanghai and Singapore [*Penang Sin Poe*, June 29, 1905]. To further justify his call for the boycott, he highlighted the uncivilized manner in which the Americans had treated Chinese people. Another speaker, Kaw Cheng Sian (Gu Zhenshan 辜慎善), read aloud the letter sent by Lim Boon Keng and then explained the origins of the Chinese exclusion laws practiced in the United States. He also advised the Chinese to unite and stand firm on this issue, in which the "national sovereignty" was involved [*ibid.*].

Though most lecturers spoke in their own dialects, one leader, Gnoh Lean Tuck (Wu Liande 伍连德), addressed in English, thus indicating that the participants must have included not only Chinese immigrants but also "Baba" (Straits-born Chinese) who were usually English-educated. Like Lim Boon Keng of Singapore, Gnoh was also a recipient of the Queen's scholarship. After he had completed his medical training in England, he returned to Penang and run a medical clinic. Gnoh was also closely related to Lim, not only had they similar educational background and professional training, but also relatives as Gnoh married the younger sister of Lim's wife. Both Gnoh and Lim were regarded as community leaders in

Penang and Singapore, respectively, especially among the English-educated Chinese. In his speech, Gnoh emphasized that Penang Chinese should work closely with their counterparts in Shanghai and Singapore in boycotting American goods. He believed that only when the Asian markets for American goods were adversely affected would the Americans realize the feeling and concerns of the Chinese [*Penang Sin Poe*, June 29, 1905]. Following Gnoh's speech, other merchant leaders, including Lim Seng Hooi (Lin Chenghui 林成輝), Oon Boon Tan (Wen Wendan 温文旦) and Cheah Tek Soon (Xie Deshun 谢德顺), also made speeches which seemed to further fuel anti-American sentiment [U.S. National Archives 1833-1906: Sep. 19, 1905]. Finally, participants of the meeting unanimously passed resolutions proclaiming that: firstly, the Penang Chinese agreed to join the boycott of American goods; secondly, they would wire their decision to the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce and the ministries of Commerce and Foreign Affairs in Peking; thirdly, they would organize a ten-member committee to cooperate with the guilds and native-place associations and to oversee the execution of boycott [*Straits Times*, July 3, 1905; Godley 1981: 123]. The ten members comprised five Hokkiens and five Cantonese, representing the two major dialect groups in Penang.<sup>7)</sup>

The Penang Chamber of Commerce was one of the earliest organizations that applied strict measures to enforce the trade ban. Members of the Chamber agreed to pay penalties if they directly or indirectly traded in any American product. The first offense would receive a fine of \$500, a second \$1,000, and a third \$2,000.<sup>8)</sup> A circular found by Otto Schule, an American consular agent at Penang, clearly stated that:

We, the undersigned, merchants, miners, planters, importers and traders of Penang, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and voluntarily pledge ourselves that we will not, from the 13th September, 1905, import American goods, products, manufactures or machinery into the Straits Settlements or the Federated Malay States or deal in them directly or indirectly. We hereby further pledge ourselves to voluntarily and faithfully pay to the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce the following penalties, if any of us directly or indirectly imports or deals or in any way trades in American goods, products, manufactures and/or machinery from the 13th day of September, 1905, until such time as the Shanghai Guilds shall declare the removal of cessation of the boycott.

1st Offence	\$500 fine
2nd "	\$1,000 "
3rd "	\$2,000 " [U.S. National Archives 1833-1906: Sep. 12, 1905]

7) The five Hokkiens were Lim Kek Chuan, Lim Eow Hong (Lin Yaohuang 林耀煌), Oon Boon Tan, Goh Say Eng (Wu Shirong 吴世荣) and Koh Lip Teng (Gu Liting 辜立亭), and the five Cantonese were Leong Lok Hing (Liang Leqing 梁乐卿), Zheng Daping (郑大平), Yeap Yin Khye (Ye Yinjie 叶寅阶), Wu Xinshi (伍信时) and Chen Binggui (陈炳贵) [*Penang Sin Poe*, June 29, 1905].

8) Similar measures of punishment could also be found in Bangkok and Singapore. See Godley [1981: 124].

But the amount of the fine depended on the circumstances. On October 25, the boycott society of Penang fined two traders who had violated the boycott agreement. One of them imported 1,200 bags of American flour, the other 500 bags. Although the two traders explained that the orders were placed before the official launching of the boycott, they nevertheless confessed their wrongdoing and agreed to pay fines of \$700 and \$150 respectively [*Yousuowei bao*, Nov. 3, 1905]. To observe the boycott, shopkeepers usually posted notices indicating that they no longer handle goods of American origin. Some of the firms who refused to discontinue their American trade were struck off from the register of the Chamber of Commerce [Godley 1981: 124].

In Ipoh, a town in northwest peninsular Malaya and where many Chinese immigrants had settled, boycott meetings had been held since July 1905, and most of the Chinese shopkeepers agreed to support the boycott [*Straits Times*, July 18, 1905; *Lat Pau*, July 19, 1905]. Chinese in Ipoh had worked hard soliciting funds for the Shanghai boycott committee and for local funds to conduct boycott activities. A circular dated November 1, 1905, clearly expressed their concerns and the justification for their actions: "We are all Chinese people and are all carrying on business in foreign countries. We have ample experience of the ill treatment meted out to us by foreigners, but the oppression which the Chinese people suffer on arrival at [in] America is even beyond the bounds of our imagination." The circular went on to describe the origins of the boycott and the support from numerous cities in China. It continued, "we ought to raise funds for the purpose of assisting them and fulfilling our duties to our country and our fellow subjects" [*Straits Times*, Dec. 16, 1905]. Half of the donations they collected was remitted to the Boycott Society in Shanghai, while the other half was reserved for the expenses of local boycott activities [*ibid.*]. Similar anti-American activities could be found in other cities and towns in Malaya, including Kuala Lumpur in the State of Selangor, and Taiping, Teluk Anson, Kampar, and Gopeng in the State of Perak [U.S. National Archives 1833-1906: Dec. 9, 1905, Apr. 23, 1906].

### III The Characteristics of the Boycott Movement

To help advance the argument that the boycott movement was one of the earliest social movements in Singapore and Malaya, we have to analyze two characteristics of the boycott agitation. The first feature was that the anti-American feeling permeated all social classes in local Chinese communities. We have discussed how Chinese merchants and community leaders in Singapore and Penang initiated the boycott meetings. In fact, it was not only the Chinese in the upper social class who were involved, as the middle and lower segments of society also participated. Shopkeepers, laborers, drama performers, and even prostitutes supported the boycott. In Singapore, when the Mid-Autumn Festival (on the 15th day of the 8th moon in the lunar calendar) came round every year, cake shop owners and restaurant proprietors usually placed large orders for moon cakes made in Guangzhou. During the year of the boycott, they canceled the orders when they heard that the moon cakes were made from American flour

[*Straits Times*, Sep. 13, 1905]. In Penang, most of the textile retailers were die-hard boycott supporters. They agreed to stop importing and selling American textile [*Penang Sin Poe*, Sep. 12, 1905]. Though they suffered significant losses in their business, in the early months of boycott movements, patriotism along with anti-American sentiment overrode personal interest. Some of the shopkeepers found a way out to alleviate their business loss, by importing Chinese textile instead. A retailer in Kampar gradually got his business back on track after importing substitute textile from China [*Penang Sin Poe*, Nov. 3, 1905].

Inevitably, there were some businessmen who placed their personal interest over public service. They sold American goods secretly to avoid criticism. But there were few of such "traitors," mainly because they were aware that they would be subjected to public denouncement if they were found out. The traitor would be labeled *Liangxue Dongwu* (literally cold-blooded animal), meaning that they were not human. This animal epithet was adopted directly from China where boycott activists also referred to merchants who betrayed their boycott commitment as "cold-blooded animals" [Wasserstrom and Wong 1996: 54]. A retailer in Penang was the center of discussion in a meeting in the Chinese Town Hall because he was discovered importing 3,000 bags of American flour. All the participants in the meeting demanded that the shopkeeper cancel the secret deal and condemned him as "a man with no concern of national interest, and a man having the nature of cold-blooded animals" [*Penang Sin Poe*, Oct. 20, 1905]. Measures of punishment were also meted out to the man during the meeting.

To avoid misunderstanding, some Chinese merchants who dealt with European merchandise made sure that consumers knew the place of origin of their products. A local distributor of the Wood's Great Peppermint Cure Company posted advertisements in the two leading Chinese newspapers in Singapore and Penang. The headline read, "This medicine is not made in the United States" [*Lat Pau*, Sep. 16, 1905; *Penang Sin Poe*, Aug. 12, 1905]. Another authorized agent of a British manufacturer of medical products even went further to post an advertisement to warn those who spread rumors about the manufacturing of his products. The headline of the announcement read, "To Proclaim It Is Not American Goods; Those Who Disperse Rumors Will Be Persecuted." The advertisement went on to clarify that the medical product, Dr. William's Pink Pills for Pale People, was actually made in England [*Penang Sin Poe*, Dec. 29, 1905].

The Chinese in the lower strata of the society also played a role in the anti-American movement. In Singapore, the Chinese coolies in Tanjong Pagar dock launched a strike in December 1905 when an American ship named the Acme had been badly battered on the rocks in a storm and was pulled back to dock to await extensive renovation. The local boycott committee ordered coolies not to repair the American ship. Because the strike directly affected British concern for social order and economic interest, the colonial government stepped in and threatened to deport the strikers back to China and kept policemen on alert to make arrests. The coolies yielded and resumed work [*South China Morning Post*, Dec. 15, 1905; Song 1984: 375-376]. It is interesting, as Yen Ching-hwang has noted, that there is a great discrepancy between the Chinese and the English documentation of this incident, especially concerning the

solution to the crisis [Yen 1976: 86n]. According to Chinese source, Tan Chor Nam and Teo Eng Hock (Zhang Yongfu 张永福) took credit for a peaceful settlement [Feng 1953: 76-77]. When a British official approached He Kuan (何宽), an interpreter in the Chinese Protectorate, to solve the problem, He Kuan replied that the problem would be solved only if Tan and Teo could be persuaded to mediate. The official thus invited the two leaders to his office to sign an announcement to persuade the coolies to return to work. The strike ended a few hours after the notice was posted. However, not much information on this strike can be found in English sources. In the annual report, W.D. Barnes, the British official in charge of Chinese affairs in Singapore, mentioned only briefly that "an attempt was made to induce the Tanjong Pagar hands to refuse to work on the repairs of an American ship but collapsed immediately upon my interviewing the fore-man" [Yen 1976: 86n]. Further investigation would be needed to confirm which of the two accounts is correct. However, one thing was certain: the coolies did stage a strike in support of the boycott.

Even the prostitutes, considered the lowest class in the society, supported the boycott. A prostitute named Xiaotao (literally "little peach"), stationed in the brothel Qunyu Lou (群玉楼) in Chinatown, urged her customers not to use and buy American goods [*Yousuowei bao*, Jan. 7, 1906]. In one instance, when Xiaotao saw a customer smoking an American cigarette, she scolded him, snatched the cigarette away from the customer's mouth, and threw it outside the door. Surprisingly, the customer was not angry but apologized to her instead. This news report implies that the boycott message permeated every corner of society. The journalist who recorded the incident added that, not only did the prostitutes in Singapore support the boycott, but also their counterparts in Macao and Guangzhou [*ibid.*].

Popular support for the boycott movement was clearly evident in the fundraising efforts made. When a boycott meeting took place in Teluk Anson on September 6, 1905, a sum of \$484.80 was collected. Among the 176 donors, only 11 of them donated \$10 and above, and only 19 of them donated between \$3 and \$6. The majority of the donors, 146 of them, donated between \$0.20 and \$2.00 (see Table 1). Most of the donors who donated \$2 and below were those from the middle and lower segments of the society. The rich would not donate small sums of money because if they did so they would "lose face" when the donors list was printed in the newspaper.

The financial contribution of the Chinese in Teluk Anson was not unique. The Chinese in two other towns in the State of Perak also launched donation drives, one in early September and another one in early October. The local boycott committee collected \$732.90 in the early drive, and \$1,027.70 in the second donation call [*Penang Sin Poe*, Sep. 6, 1905; Oct. 14, 1905]. In both cases, the lion's share came from the populace.

It would be an exaggeration to claim that the 1905 boycott in Singapore and Malaya was a popular movement. No document could be found to show the exact number of people involved, nor could we find the correct percentage of the people who had been mobilized during the boycott campaign. Nevertheless, it is not an overstatement to call this movement a social movement because, as we have shown, people from different strata of the society were jointly

**Table 1** Fundraising in Teluk Anson, Perak, September 6, 1905

Amount of Donation	Numbers of Donors	Subtotal
\$30	6	\$180
\$20	2	\$ 40
\$12	1	\$ 12
\$10	2	\$ 20
\$ 6	2	\$ 12
\$ 5	8	\$ 40
\$ 4	4	\$ 16
\$ 3	5	\$ 15
\$ 2	29	\$ 58
\$ 1	72	\$ 72
\$ 0.50	36	\$ 18
\$ 0.20	9	\$ 1.80
Total	176	\$484.80

Source: [*Penang Sin Poe*, Sep. 18, 1905]

involved in the movement, including the rich and the poor, the merchants and the coolies, and the shopkeepers and the prostitutes.

How were people from different social classes and different dialect groups successfully mobilized in the anti-American movement? The answer can be found in the second characteristic of the social movement: no effort was spared in the use of different forms of propaganda and means of mobilization to garner support. Both printed materials and oral presentation were successfully used in the movement. The former included press reports, placards, and posters, and their intended readers were those who can read. Oral presentation included songs, public lectures, and drama performances, and their intended audiences were the illiterate masses.

The publication of Chinese newspapers in Singapore and Malaya in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was influenced by the flowering of newspapers in China. As Lin Yutang has labeled it, the period between 1895 and 1911 was the "Golden Period" of the Chinese press [Lin 1936: 94]. According to a survey conducted by a leading newspaper in China in September 1905, there were 269 Chinese newspapers in publication across China at the turn of the century [*Dagong bao*, Sep. 11-25, 1905]. Most newspapers in the late Qing China were designed to serve the public interest and to enlighten readers, rather than to make a profit for their publishers. They were concerned with contemporary political and social affairs, and each had a distinctive political message that it promoted openly [Ge 1964: 177], except for some commercial newspapers and those published by missionaries or foreign journalists which stressed commercial news and avoided political advocacy or controversy [Lee and Nathan 1985: 362-363]. Joan Judge, in her study of the *Shibao* (a Shanghai-based wide-circulated newspaper), has pointed out that the birth of *Shibao* in 1904 witnessed a transition from dynastic to public politics. Journalists and political writers created, and sometimes manipulated, collective popular opinion. They deliberately made use of rhetoric in the service

of politics [Judge 1994: 84-86]. The periodical<sup>9)</sup> was the most important media for the exchange of opinion among elite and for the dissemination of information. The new power of the native press laid a foundation for the nationwide boycott in China.

In addition to the influence of the development in China, the local press industry flourished because of changing social and economic conditions in Singapore and Malaya at the turn of the century. Thousands of Chinese immigrants continued to pour into the region to work in the tin mines and plantations. Though most of these new immigrants were illiterate peasants from China, some were literate clerks, merchants, and political refugees. The literate became the immediate target audience of the Chinese news writers [Chen, Ai Yen 1991: 293]. As in China, the Chinese presses in Singapore and Malaya played a similar role to enlighten Chinese immigrants, and became important tools for social and political awakening among the Chinese. The similarity of the presses in China and Nanyang was further strengthened by the fact that most proprietors, editors, and chief writers of local newspapers came from China [Wang, Hong Teng 1997; Chen, Ai Yen 1991: 290], and most of them were intellectuals or political refugees. The local presses also provided information about events in their home country. The number of presses in Singapore and Malaya was of course fewer than that in China due to the size of readership.

There were two widely circulated Chinese newspapers in publication in Singapore and Malaya during the boycott period: the Singapore-based *Lat Pau* and the Penang-based *Penang Sin Poe*. The two newspapers reported the developments of the boycott campaigns almost daily. In a rough calculation, 248 pieces of boycott news reports appeared in the *Penang Sin Poe* between May 1905 and April 1906. Most of the reports kept readers updated daily on boycott activities, including those taking place in China, and served as a catalyst to encourage the local Chinese to join action with their countrymen in China. Another 44 editorials or commentaries appeared in the same period played even more significant roles in generating the anti-American sentiments in Singapore and Malaya. These articles rationalized the call for a boycott. For example, a commentary published on November 15, 1905 traced the root of anti-American boycott to the mistreatment of Chinese immigrants in the United States in the past two decades. It stated that:

Since an exclusion treaty was signed in 1884, all Chinese labors were not allowed to enter the territory of the United States. Even those who were not laborers, but businessmen, students, visitors, officials and transit passengers, were given a hard time whenever they went ashore. These legally exempted (from exclusion) Chinese usually were confined in a wooden shelter for days before they were called to be interviewed. During the investigation, the Chinese had to answer Americans' questions carefully because the investigators were working for the slightest excuse to turn them away. Those who were lucky enough to be admitted still have to live in America with extreme care. The American

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9) The terms "periodical" and "newspaper" are used loosely in this article and sometimes are interchangeable. They refer to daily and weekly newspapers, periodicals, and magazines.

immigration officials and police conducted frequent checks for documents. Those who did not have the legal documents with them were in danger of being termed illegal immigrants and expatriated. [Penang Sin Poe, Nov. 15, 1905]

The desperate mood of the new arrivals who were confined in the wooden shelter pending document verification and physical examination was clearly depicted in a collection of poems entitled *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940*. This collection comprises pieces of poetry written by the new arrivals who were still confined in an offshore island off the bay of San Francisco.<sup>10)</sup> The Angel Island was used as the immigration detention headquarters for Chinese awaiting jurisdiction on the outcomes of medical examinations and immigration papers. It was also the holding ground for deportees awaiting transportation back to China [Lai *et al.* 1980: 8]. An extract from a poem inscribed on the Angel Island barracks read:

Imprisoned in the wooden building day after day,  
May freedom withheld; how can I bear to talk about it?  
I look to see who is happy but they only sit quietly.  
I am anxious and depressed and cannot fall asleep.  
The days are long and the bottle constantly empty;  
my sad mood, even so, is not dispelled.  
Nights are long and the pillow cold; who can pity my loneliness?  
After experiencing such loneliness and sorrow,  
Why not just return home and learn to plow the fields? [ibid.: 68]

Many of them indeed returned to China because they were told they had failed their medical examinations or that their documents were not in order. Those who were forced to return home reported their mistreatment upon arrival, and became advocates of the anti-American campaign. For example, among the victims of the Chinese delegation to the St. Louis Exposition of 1904 was a Shanghai merchant leader, Fang Shouliu (方守六), who later became an outspoken supporter of the anti-American campaign [Zhang 1966: 9]. News of American mistreatment of Chinese immigrants spread across China and Southeast Asia, and became inspiring sources for journalists of local newspapers.

Another article, "On Nanyang Chinese Merchants should Fight against American Exclusionary Policy," appeared on the front page of the *Penang Sin Poe* on June 20, 1905. The author was dissatisfied with the passive involvement of the Nanyang Chinese in the boycott campaign. He cried out and asked, "Were the Chinese merchants in Nanyang the one who had

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10) Although all the poems inscribed on the island's barracks were written after the boycott movement, the misery of those who suffered before 1905 was not any easier than those in the period of 1910-1940 as the book showed.



no sense of patriotism and unity?" He urged the local Chinese merchants to actively work together to boycott American goods. Only a successful boycott, he believed, could make the Chinese proud of themselves and regain their self-esteem [*Penang Sin Poe*, June 20, 1905]. Some authors gave good examples to encourage the local people to join the boycott. One of them mentioned that a 12-year-old girl supported the boycott by throwing away all her American-made toys. The author reminded readers that "even a female knew about public outrage, and how about a male? Even a child knew the righteousness, and how about an adult?" [*Penang Sin Poe*, Sep. 6, 1905].

Publishers of local newspapers noticed that only a few well-educated people could read their commentaries and editorials. To widen their readership, newspapers created an additional section called "supplements" or *Fugan* (副刊) for semi-literate readers. *Fugan* contained popular stories, folk songs and ballads, couplets, and even jokes. All the pieces in *Fugan* were written in vernacular form, so that the boycott messages could be read by semi-literate readers. The most common genre of popular literature in *Fugan* was the ballad. The misery of the Chinese immigrants who were mistreated by the Americans was frequently mentioned. The episode of the Hawaiian government burning the Chinatown was a popular theme in anti-American ballads. The ballad entitled "Resisting American (exclusionary) Treaties" told of how the Hawaiian government, acting on the excuse that contagious diseases were spreading in the Chinatown, burned the Chinese quarter to ashes. The fire in Chinatown resulted in the Chinese residents having "no place to run, no property to own, no home to stay, and no tear to shed" [*Penang Sin Poe*, Aug. 24, 1905]. Another popular theme in ballads was the treatment of the new arrivals in the "Wooden Buildings." Before the Chinese immigrants could go ashore, they had to be stripped naked and tagged as criminals and had to be sterilized by hosing them down. The Chinese in Singapore were able to sympathize with their sufferings because most of the Chinese there had to undergo a similar sterilizing process on St. John Island upon arrival. Although the practice of the sterilization was a measure of hygiene, the Chinese could not understand why they were the only ones subjected to the treatment whilst the new comers from Europe were exempted. Some anti-American ballads praised the boycott supporters and cursed the "traitors." A Cantonese ballad, for example, praised a group of merchants who vowed not to sell American goods in front of the image of a deity. The ballad also placed a curse on anyone who broke the vow relegating them to a childless destiny — the most severe punishment in traditional Chinese belief [*Penang Sin Poe*, Aug. 22, 1905].

Short stories with a boycott theme could also be found in the *Fugan* section of the local newspapers. A story described a man called for a meeting to protest against *mei ren* (literally "beautiful being" or "beauty"). Many people attended the meeting because they thought that it was an anti-American gathering, as the Chinese translation of the country name of the United States of America was *mei guo* or "beautiful nation." Thus, *mei ren* could mean "the Americans." In fact, the man who called the meeting was a man who was always bullied by his vicious wife. He later clarified that what he called "*mei ren*" was "the beauty in our bedrooms," but not the Americans. He would like to get together men with the same problem and set up an

anti-vicious wife alliance to deal with their “beauties” [*Penang Sin Poe*, Aug. 29, 1905]. This story might be fictitious, but the message behind the story clearly showed that the anti-American sentiment was high. Whenever there was a call for an anti-American gathering, people rallied around for support. The pro-boycott writers also wanted to use this kind of popular and humorous stories to promote anti-American boycott.

As the majority of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya were illiterate, the boycott promoters had to find other means to reach out to them. One of the measures was to give lectures in reading clubs.<sup>11)</sup> The establishment in 1903 of the Singapore Reading Club, one of the oldest newspaper reading clubs in the city, was a particularly important moment in the spread of the boycott movement. The founder was Zheng Pinting (郑聘廷), a Chinese Christian missionary, and the primary financial sponsor of the club was Tan Chor Nam, the most influential boycott advocate and revolutionary leader. Whenever the club sponsored public talks, Tan, with another leader, Teo Eng Hock, took the opportunity to address the audience on boycott and revolutionary issues, and these aroused considerable public interest [Yen 1974: 55]. A special feature of the lectures in Singapore was that each speaker spoke in his own dialect to accommodate the audience from different dialect groups. For example, Chen Guansheng (陈关圣) usually spoke in Cantonese and Huang Songting (黄松亭) in Teochew [*Lat Pau*, Aug. 22, 1905]. In addition to regular lectures, the club's members provided reading service to the illiterate. By reading boycott news aloud to the illiterate, the club played an important role in social and political enlightenment [*Xinwen bao*, Aug. 28, 1905]. Yen Ching-hwang has pointed out that, between 1906 and 1911, the reading clubs in Singapore and Malaya played an important role in education and in wakening the Chinese politically [Yen 1974: 54-57]. In fact, as we have seen in the case of the 1905 boycott, the reading clubs in Singapore were key players in enlightening the illiterates even before 1906.

While lectures in reading clubs benefited only small groups of audience, open-air public lectures that took place at the corners of streets or in front of temples or other public buildings attracted a larger crowd. As we have mentioned, the very first anti-American meeting in Singapore took place in front of the Thong Chai Hospital. The public rally in Teluk Anson was also held in a public place, where Hu Cailin (胡采林), Lin Wenli (林文理), and Gao Tingqiu (高廷求) were invited to step on the stage and give lectures. Their speeches were so emotional that the audience was touched and donated some \$400 for the boycott cause [*Penang Sin Poe*, Sep. 27, 1905].

If the public lectures still did not attract enough public awareness, Chinese operas and drama performances did. In China, drama was not only one of the most popular forms of entertainment, but also the most effective agent of mass education [Yen 1976: 122]. Because the Chinese community in Nanyang was a microcosm of that in China, drama in Nanyang played a similar role in education. Therefore, social events such as watching opera, long grounded in Chinese culture, were used to spread boycott messages to the bottom stratum of the society.

11) For the political and social roles of reading clubs in Singapore, see Yen [1974: 54-57].

When memorial services for a boycott martyr Feng Xiawei took place in different locales in China, drama troupes in Singapore acted out the martyrdom of Feng. Feng had worked as a laborer in Mexico for several years before returning to China in early 1905. Two months after the boycott was called by Shanghai merchants, Feng committed suicide in front of the American consulate in Shanghai on July 27, 1905. He killed himself because he would like to rouse his countrymen and to urge them to support the boycott without reservation. Feng was the only person who gave up his life for the boycott movement. Activists honored him as the "boycott martyr" [Wong 1995b: 195-199]. Memorial services were held in many places, in China proper and overseas, as part of the boycott strategies and activities. In Singapore, Tan Chor Nam and other organizers constructed a large temporary shelter in front of the Thong Chai Hospital to accommodate worshipers who came to pay homage to the martyr. Tan and Teo Eng Hock held Feng's memorial service to hope that they could kill two birds in one stone by connecting the anti-American feeling with anti-Manchuism [Yen 1976: 65]. Several thousand people attended the meeting. There were many speeches provoking boycott agitation, and the audience responded favorably to the speakers' orations [Feng 1953: 76; 1965: III, 185]. A local journalist reported that "the speeches were received with much applause and waving of hats" [*Hong Kong Daily Press*, Dec. 16, 1905]. During the meeting, a considerable sum of money was collected through donations towards a fund to be used to compensate traders for losses they might sustain and to support the promoters of the cause [*ibid.*].

The opera entitled "The Death of Feng Xiawei" was performed by the two drama troupes in Singapore, one in a theater in Smith Street, another in Wayang Street. It informed the audience, most of whom were working-class men and women, of the causes of the boycott [*South China Morning Post*, Jan. 1, 1906]. According to a local correspondent who visited one of the theaters, "usually the actors sing and converse in the Southern Mandarin dialects, which [are] a little difficult for the uneducated Cantonese to understand, but last night they deliberately discoursed in the plain Cantonese dialect, so that they could be clearly understood. At least the low class of Cantonese last night learned from the piece the cause of the boycott" [*ibid.*]. Thus, the drama sustained the momentum of the anti-American protest.

#### IV Reaction to the Boycott Agitation

Because of the popular support and the driving force of propaganda, the boycott in Singapore and Malaya kept the heat for several months after its outbreak in June 1905. American diplomats, initially, did not take the boycott seriously. David Wilber, the American consul in Singapore, reported to his superiors in Washington that there were still no serious results in July and August, although merchants in Perak and Selangor, two states in British Malaya, had joined in the movement [U.S. National Archives 1833-1906: July 31, Aug. 15, Aug. 24, 1905]. After his early optimism, however, Wilber changed his tone and admitted that the boycott had been "decidedly serious" and business in American goods was definitely being affected [Godley 1981: 124]. Economic historian Charles F. Remer believed that, based on statistical data, the

volume of trade between the United States and this region was small and therefore the economic effectiveness of the boycott was insignificant [Remer 1933: 35-39]. But in reality, especially from the psychological point of view, the impact on Americans who had business in this region was great. Reports of the American diplomat proved the seriousness of the situation. On November 14, Wilber cabled the Secretary of State Elihu Root that boycott had taken "decidedly serious turn" and feared trouble had begun [U.S. National Archives 1833-1906: Nov. 14, 1905]. He also reported that "every firm here handling American goods reports trade at a standstill with the Chinese" and anonymous threatening letters were circulating and that anti-American handbills were being posted in all Chinese shops [Godley 1981: 124]. Noticing the urgency, Root cabled back next day: "Wilber, Consul General, Singapore, Notify local authorities of anonymous threats and unlawful combinations, Asking proper steps to be taken" [U.S. National Archives 1833-1906: Nov. 15, 1905].

Without fully understanding the nature of the boycott and the feeling of local Chinese, Wilber suspected that European competitors, especially the Germans, might have been quietly encouraging the boycott [*ibid.*: Nov. 13, 1905]. He then called upon the British Governor and requested British authorities in the Straits Settlements to suppress the boycott [*ibid.*: Nov. 16, 1905]. Although the British Governor promised Wilber that the police would investigate, Wilber remained convinced of British complicity [*loc. cit.*]. When British interests were not harmed by the boycott, Wilber found it difficult to obtain British cooperation [*loc. cit.*]. In December, Wilber foresaw the impact of the boycott and believed that "should the boycott be declared off (now), that it will be years before we will fully recover from its effects" [*ibid.*: Dec. 9, 1905].

Anti-American activities begin to decline in 1906, but boycotters continued to spread propaganda. In May 1906 an article reiterated that the boycott was just, because Americans had treated Chinese men badly [*Lat Pau*, May 26, 1906]. Only after June 1906, a year after the boycott was launched, did conditions begin to change, and Wilber was able to report back to Washington that a general improvement at all places, including Singapore, Penang, and Federated Malay States, had occurred [U.S. National Archives 1833-1906: June 13, 1906]. The most important reason for the cessation of the boycott movement in Nanyang was the loss of momentum of the anti-American agitation in China since early 1906. The people in China, as well as Nanyang Chinese, shifted their attention to other new and urgent domestic and foreign issues such as the political movement to recover the mining rights from foreigners [Lee 1978]. However, the boycott in Singapore and Malaya did not fade away without a trace. In fact, the consequence of the boycott was great. It contributed to the rise of Chinese nationalism in the region and the full involvement of the local Chinese in the revolutionary movement against the Manchu regime in China.

## V Conclusion: The Significance of the Boycott Movement

Students of Chinese society and politics in Singapore and Malaya in the first decade of the

twentieth century have, hitherto, focused on the power struggles between the Revolutionaries and the Reformists [Yen 1976; Wang, Gungwu 1953]. The Revolutionary, led by Sun Yat-sen, intended to overthrow the Qing dynasty by force and establish a republican nation. The Reformists, led by Kang Youwei (康有为) and Liang Qichao (梁启超), tried to reform the Manchu government from within and transform China from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. Leaders of both camps were not tolerated by the Qing government and they were forced to flee overseas. They traveled to Japan, Europe, the United States, and Southeast Asia to sell their political ideas to overseas Chinese. In Singapore and Malaya, the two political factions tried to expand their influence over the local Chinese in order to receive their financial support. Both political camps published their own newspapers for propaganda purposes [Chen, Mong Hock 1967: 86-110]. For example, the *Union Times* (Nanyang zonghui boa 南洋总汇报) was run by the Reformists, while the *Chong Shing Yit Pao* (Zhongxing ribao 中兴日报) was sponsored by the Revolutionaries. Articles that defamed their political opponents and distorted their political platform appeared frequently in these two newspapers. Both sides also organized their public lectures separately, and accused each other of delaying the implementation of their political plans to renew China.

But the political climate was not as extreme as previous accounts had asserted. Instead, the event of 1905 demonstrated that the local Chinese joined hand in hand to boycott American goods, regardless of their social classes and political orientations. Mainly did so because most of them realized that if they did not participate in opposing American exclusionary policy, their opportunities to work and live in the British colonies would be adversely affected. Their worries were not baseless. Another British colony, Australia, had been discriminating against Chinese immigrants since the second half of the nineteenth century. When Australia was granted independence in 1901, the first bill introduced by the parliament of the new Federation of Australia was the Immigration Restriction Bill against Asian immigrants, of whom the Chinese accounted for the largest percentage. A dictation test was imposed to new immigrants and only those who passed the test would be allowed to enter Australia. They were asked to "write out at dictation and sign in the presence of the officer a passage of fifty words in length in an European language (not necessary English) directed by the officer" [Rolls 1996: 415]. Almost all Chinese immigrants, of course, failed the test. In fact, very few Chinese managed to enter Australia from 1901 to 1958, when the device for controlling Asian immigrants was in effect. The so-called "White Australia" policy worried the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya. When the anti-American boycott was called, many Chinese supported it because they would like to stop the domino effect. An article in a local newspaper pinpointed the anxiety of the Chinese. It stated that if the Americans succeeded in their attempts to ban Chinese immigrants, many other countries would follow suit, and "the Chinese would have no single inch of land to stand though there is abundant land in the five continents of the world . . . and our Chinese would have no future at all" [*Penang Sin Poe*, Sep. 6, 1905]. A Cantonese ballad also reflected the concern of the local Chinese. It mentioned that if the Chinese did not unite together to boycott against American goods, they would become slaves of others. Then, "although the earth

is large, you have no place to hold up your head" [*Penang Sin Poe*, Aug. 29, 1905].

Because of the concern and anxiety of the immigration issue, the Chinese communities overwhelmingly supported the boycott. The boycott advocates included political activists with different ideological orientations—revolutionaries and reformists, as well as those with little concern about the politics in China such as businessmen and Straits-born Chinese, or the so-called “baba.” To name a few in each category, Tan Chor Nam and Teo Eng Hock who had organized several boycott meetings were the agents of Sun Yat-sen. Sun hand-picked them as the leaders of the newly established revolutionary organ, Singapore Branch of the Tongmeng Hui, in 1906. Wu Shirong (吴世荣), who was the organizer of the first Penang boycott meeting, later became the most important coordinator of revolutionary organizations in Nanyang. Wu Shirong was also the helmsman of the Penang Branch of Tongmeng Hui. On the other hand, the Reformists also supported the boycott. Foo Chee Choon (Hu Zichun 胡子春), a rich businessman and a supporter of the Reformist, was the top donor of a fundraising drive in the State of Perak [*Penang Sin Poe*, Sep. 6, 1905]. Foo Chee Choon detested the radical idea and political activities of Sun Yat-sen. When Sun and his followers traveled to Ipoh, the capital of the State of Perak and a stronghold of the Reformist, to set up his revolutionary network, he was threatened by Foo Chee Choon who asked Sun to leave the city within 24 hours. Otherwise, Hu warned that the life of Sun would be in danger. Since Hu was not only a prominent businessman but also a very influential individual among the secret societies in the area, Sun took the threat seriously and left for Singapore next day. Obviously, there was little compromise between the Reformist and the Revolutionary in their political struggles in Singapore and Malaya, but in the event of the boycott, both factions supported it in their own ways. It was mainly because no faction would like to go against the common wish of the ordinary people.

Other local businessmen who were traditionally not interested in political activities also felt the anxiety of the Chinese immigrants and supported the cause of boycott. Eu Tong Sen (Yu Dongxuan 余东旋), one of the richest plantation owners in Singapore and Malaya, supported the boycott financially. Yu topped the donor lists in two fundraising drives in the towns of Kampar and Gopeng [*Penang Sin Poe*, Nov. 13 and Dec. 7, 1905]. Some professionals, mostly native-born Chinese, also supported the boycott. Although they were British subjects and would not be the victims of exclusion policy, they considered the Americans mistreatment of the Chinese immigrants inhumane. English-educated Lim Boon Keng and Gnoh Lean Tuck were the two most prominent pro-boycott professionals. As mentioned earlier, Lim had joined the leaders of Chinese communities in Singapore to hold the first boycott rally in the city, while Wu attended and made a speech in the first boycott meeting in Penang. Both Lim and Wu supported the boycott mainly because they valued humanitarianism and social justice, and therefore the reasons for their supporting the cause were different from that of the Chinese immigrants. Nevertheless, the native-born professionals and immigrants worked together for a common goal.

In short, a common sense of boycotting American goods was formed among the Chinese in

Singapore and Malaya, despite the existence of differences in their political orientations. The antagonism between the Reformists and the Revolutionaries did not cease throughout the boycott period, but both sides showed their support for the boycott in their own ways. The concern over the immediate future of their residence status and the fate of new immigrants overrode their differences in belief about how to rebuild their homeland. Furthermore, the rise of patriotism and nationalism in the Chinese communities, as advocated by the Reformists and Revolutionaries respectively, also contributed to the popular support for the anti-American boycott, which symbolized the struggle for preserving the national dignity and sovereignty of China. So, the main protagonists on the political stage of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya in the first decade of the twentieth century, especially in 1905 and 1906, were not merely Reformists and Revolutionists, but the boycott activists who were ordinary people with different political backgrounds.

The above discussions not only reveal that the boycott was a political protest, but also a social movement. The Chinese in different strata of the society were all involved in one way or another. Wealthy merchants such as Foo Chee Choon and Yu Dongxuan, intellectuals such as the proprietors and editors of the *Penang Sin Poe* and *Lat Pau*, professionals such as Lim Boon Keng and Gnoh Lean Tuck, as well as shopkeepers, laborers or coolies, opera performers, and even prostitutes all participated in the boycott campaign to a certain extent. In terms of the scope, scale, intensity, and the variety of people involved, the 1905 boycott movement could be seen as the first social movement in the history of Singapore and Malaya. It consolidated the foundation of the revolutionary movement in Singapore and Malaya and subsequently secured the Revolutionaries' success in 1911 when they overthrew the Manchu dynasty and set up a new Republican government. The growing support of Nanyang Chinese for the revolutionary movement and anti-foreign movements since 1905 was not accidental.<sup>12)</sup> It was the consequence of the boycott movement which intensified the nationalistic sentiments of the people from different strata of the society.

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12) For a detail discussion of the influence of the 1905 boycott on the 1908 anti-Japanese boycott and the 1911 revolution, see Wong [1995a: 196-205, 251-260].

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